HLi feedback : ALIA Professional Pathways Phase 2 Consultation

4 July 2023

This submission is made on behalf of Health Libraries Inc (HLi). It will be published on the HLi website for our members. We agree to publication on the ALIA Professional Pathways website under Health Libraries Inc (HLi).

This feedback is given in response to:

> *Consultation paper: Library and information services workforce: Framework and Recognition.* Australian Library and Information Association, Canberra ACT, May 2023. Link: https://professionalpathways.alia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PP_Phase_2_Consultation_Paper_May_2023.pdf

General feedback

We would like to clarify that health libraries did not 'misunderstand' communications from ALIA. In contrast, health librarians and library technicians engaged with ALIA's consultation process and information communicated on Professional Pathways including focus groups, workshops, reports and conference presentations.

We raised valid concerns about verbal and written information from ALIA that was unclear about professional positions, education pathways and professional practice in our sector.

Research methodology

We still have grave concerns about the methodology and conduct of the research that underpins the Professional Pathways project. On this point: a reproducible search for evidence has not been published; ethics approval was not sought for research involving human participants; and the use of university resources for commercial research may constitute a breach of licence agreements.

The presentation of only one framework in the consultation paper is a methodological flaw and potential source of bias. There is some brief discussion in the Research paper about alternative frameworks submitted, including that prepared by ALIA HLA, but no serious consideration is given to the suggested alternatives.

Strengthening LIS courses

We are pleased to note the changes in project direction resulting from feedback. We are also pleased to see mention of the recommendation to work with LIS educators to strengthen LIS courses. Tertiary education underpins a professional library and information sector. However, we would have liked more information about what work is underway on this recommendation.

The LIS courses provided by universities and TAFEs are particularly important to librarian positions, library technician positions, library management positions, and library sectors such as health, law and specials. Yet, there is a continuing lack of detail about this framework component.

There is no record of ALIA action on the recommendation to strengthen LIS courses in this Research paper or any of the consultation papers. We believe that strong LIS courses should be discussed together with the design of the framework. It is a glaring omission from the consultation process and papers.

The pathway to becoming a library and information professional should be by completing an accredited LIS course that covers all 8 professional knowledge domains (PKD) in addition to the core domains. Terminology elsewhere about the core domains as the 'starting point' is misleading because it conflicts with the 'starting point' for professional roles which is a tertiary qualification.

Professionalism

The use of pathway suggests a starting point. This is not supported by the framework image. Pathways might not be hierarchical or chronological, but the terminology does allude to entry and progress points. As a result, there is a mismatch between terminology and the framework image.

LIS professional qualifications are a substantial part of the library and information sector. They should be included in the visual presentation of the framework. As noted above, entry points are also missing. This vague approach makes it unclear who the framework applies to and how. It is too generic to be useful, nor does it represent a pathway that would entail a starting point for education or continuing learning.

We would like clarification from ALIA that there is no long-term plan to gradually move towards "ALIA-accredited micro-credentials or courses offered by educators or ALIA, or ALIA-accredited in-house training for larger institutions" for formal LIS qualifications, in the case that ALIA does not act on or succeed at strengthening LIS courses.

We would like clarification that completing micro or short courses for all professional knowledge domains will not suffice for professional status with ALIA now or in the future.

Continuing professional education (CPD)

Support for credentialing and professional development is appreciated as a positive aspect of the framework. Health librarians and library technicians welcome ongoing workplace and informal/formal learning as we understand the importance of education to professional practice.

Informal training or micro credentials offered by ALIA must be affordable and high quality. The current moodle style courses on offer from ALIA do not compare well to training available from other organisations.

Developing a structured system of affordable, relevant and high quality CPD specialisations for those who are LIS qualified as well as for others who work in the LIS sector, should be the number 1 priority. This must be done in consultation with all stakeholders - individuals, employers, professional associations and educators.

A systematic and structured approach to CPD is imperative if ALIA is to fulfil its responsibilities in upholding standards of professional practice, and for the sustainability of librarianship as a profession. The necessity of CPD applies to all librarians and library technicians, and others who work in the LIS sector (not only to those in specialist roles).

Finally,

We question the suggestion in the report that there is overwhelming support for the proposed framework. A range of views were evident at multi-sector consultation workshops and in the public submissions to ALIA. Several concerns have been publicly raised about the proposal from a range of stakeholders.

We believe that ALIA, as an association for library and information professionals, should be directing attention and effort to more advocacy on the essential role and value of libraries and to enhancing member value by helping members to build a resilient and diverse workforce. Success on this front will rely on respected and educated professionals as well as ethics and values. Libraries should be a growth industry, and the right advocacy from ALIA could do wonders.